

to the editor

Who should be born?

It seems that the scientists, philosophers, lawyers and theologians who are concerned with "The right to life: Who is to decide?" (SN: 10/30/71, p. 298), are late in their study. Under the abortion laws of some states—and the trend seems to be for other states to follow—the mother decides. She decides simply whether she wants the child regardless of whether it is healthy and normal.

If a mother can decide whether a child is born on the basis of whether it is convenient for her, it would seem she could also decide when given the information about possible defective babies.

I think we should remember that one of the world's greatest electrical engineers, Steinmetz, was a hunchback. If he would not have been permitted to be born the world would have lost the benefit of his electrical genius.

James F. Jackson
Carlisle, Ind.

Humaneness, death and seals

Your coverage of the news conference on the Pribilof seals (SN: 9/18/71, p. 188) appears to be quite accurate. I am pleased that it is.

The Secretary of Commerce recognizes the difficulty in solving complex problems. Apparently his solution is to separate them into smaller individual problems. In our instance we were requested to observe the present method employed in the slaughter of the Northern Fur Seal on the Pribilof Islands for humaneness and to suggest, if possible, alternate methods which would prove more humane. We were not asked to solve the problem of justification for killing seals or any animal, male or female, the proper number to be killed per unit of time, the appropriateness of our present international treaties, the impact of change for the Aleuts, etc.

Further, we saw humaneness, as veterinarians, to be principally how humane the practice is for the seal. Miss Alice Harrington is more concerned about humaneness for people. Apparently she, and others similarly engaged, import pictures, write horror stories, and disseminate the same to the world public. This information is peddled even to young children who are scarcely mature enough to struggle with the concept of death let alone how and when it might best occur where man intercedes.

Death in the hands of God is most distressing for most of us, yet it is a regular reality. I am tempted to believe the emotional distress the public experiences is manmade, unnecessary and unjustified. It is a practice of preying upon the emotions of human beings, collecting dollars and using them to expand the distress. They do not support research for eliminating disease, altering behavior which would expand opportunities to use natural, now unused, resources for the seal's benefit or chemical methods for population control, which might improve the life of the seal.

The quote about the influence of our

presence upon what we observed is correct. I am of the opinion it typified what occurs otherwise. However, we had no controls, no proof. Apparently when Miss Harrington was there the reverse occurred. The Aleuts performed badly for her benefit. I am tempted to believe they know her better and what she stands for than they did a group of veterinarians and performed accordingly. Further, she must anticipate that everyone is like she is, they never make a mistake. The Aleuts never find a time when a second stunning act is indicated or necessary.

Thanks for listening. I have made the mistake of discussing issues involving subject matter areas in which I have no professional competence. Please forgive my humanism.

C. Roger Smith, D.V.M.
College of Veterinary Medicine
Ohio State University
Columbus, Ohio

Unscientific

The "experiment" attempting to relate pot-smoking to creativity (SN: 9/18/71, p. 191) is absurdly unscientific on the face of it, all the way from the self-classification by the participants to the foregone conclusions and inversion of cause and effect. It is surely self-evident that students having the most "adventuresomeness" and the least "authoritarianism" are the most likely to use illicit drugs in the first place. This temperament has always characterized many creative and most criminal human beings.

One finding that is crystal clear is the pro-pot bias of the researchers. They are obviously doing their best to encourage the use of marijuana among students. It is regrettable that SCIENCE NEWS is helping to spread their propaganda.

F. P. McCormack
Monte Vista, Calif.

Blue ribbon for iridium

Your comment in the Letters to the Editor (SN: 10/30/71, p. 288) that osmium is the densest element is apparently incorrect.

According to W. A. E. McBryde (p. 302 and p. 496 in "The Encyclopedia of the Chemical Elements" in 1968, C. Hampel, Editor; Reinhold Book Corp., New York, 849 pp.) recent measurements show that iridium is denser than osmium. The densities given at 20 degrees C. are iridium = 22.65 g/cc; osmium = 22.61 g/cc.

A. F. Amos
Staff Associate
Lamont-Doherty Geological
Observatory
of Columbia University
Palisades, N.Y.

(The advance of science never slows. The 1968 reference we had used shows osmium with the greatest density, but a 1970 reference confirms the figures Amos reports.—Ed.)

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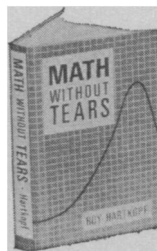
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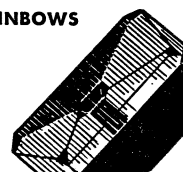


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